

LECTURE  
ON  
**EMERSON,**

BY  
GEORGE STEWART, JR., ESQ.,

Author of "Canada under the Administration of the Earl of  
Dufferin," etc.

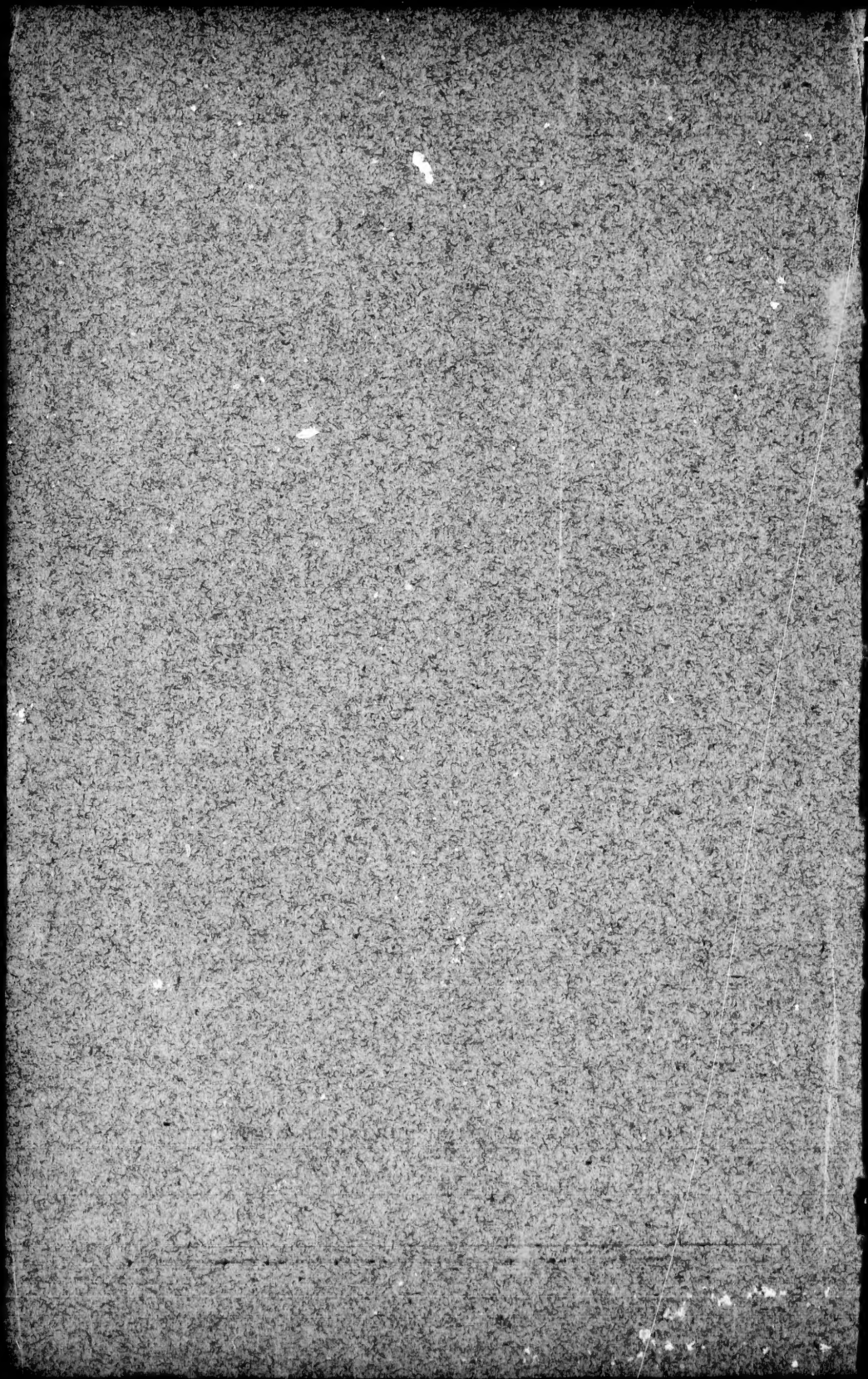
DELIVERED BEFORE THE  
LITERARY AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF QUEBEC,

9TH JANUARY, 1879.

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# EMERSON, THE THINKER,

READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY ON THURSDAY EVENING,  
9TH JANUARY, 1879,

BY

GEORGE STEWART, JR.,

Author of "Canada under the Administration of the Earl of  
Dufferin," etc.

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*Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

SOME of you, doubtless, remember seeing a print, issued a few years ago, which represented a literary party at Washington Irving's. In the centre of the group sat the author of "Rip Van Winkle," while around him stood and sat the prominent pen men of his time. You have seen hanging on many walls, engravings of a picture which grew out of the imagination of a great painter, entitled "Shakespeare and his friends," and a few of you, perhaps, are familiar with the grand canvas which seems so endowed with life, and which exhibits, with wonderful fidelity, the hard features of the autocratic Johnson, the plastic face of the mercurial Sheridan, the classic front of Burke, the inspired head of the warm-hearted Goldsmith, and the tragic countenance of the player Garrick. One cannot look upon pictures like these without feeling proud of the age which gave birth to such men; men who have been the moulders of thought in their day, and whose works have come down to us through the long decades of time. It is the literature of a country which tells us of her progress and civilization. The letters of a nation reveal to us in unmistakable language, the culture and social and political advancement of her people.



I will ask you this evening to look upon an ideal canvas which contains the portraits of a few modern literary worthies who have cast a lustre upon these times, and whose labours have enriched the age in which we live. I will ask you to imagine, if you can, another group. Some of the faces you see, you will recognize, for you have looked upon them in the Irving engraving. Others will be new to you for they have grown great, since Mr. Bryant spoke his eloquent tribute to the memory of the author of "The Sketch Book" and "Bracebridge Hall." Look! upon the starting, breathing canvas. Look! upon the figures which burst into form and grow into life !

This is Longfellow, the gentle poet who has sung for us the ever graceful, ever tuneful *Evangeline*, that story which winds itself around every heart, and which is so dear to every Acadian youth and maiden, that tearful story of the expulsion of the French, which, you remember, a Canadian told to Hawthorne, in the hope that a romance might be made out of it. You know the history of the poem; how Hawthorne gave the idea to Longfellow as he was sitting one day in his study in old Cambridge; how the poet took it up, and in a few days finished the poem in that curious hexameter measure, which Longfellow feared would destroy its popularity. You remember his letter to Procter whom he asked not to reject the poem on account of its metre, which he said could be written in no other way without changing its character completely. You have heard how delighted Hawthorne was when the poem was read to him, and you know, of course, that the poet himself has never beheld the quiet Village of Grand Pré, which his pen has so skilfully described. This is Longfellow in his 72nd year, with white hair and beard, but with eye bright and full of lustre.

This other form, on the poet's right, is the Quaker bard of New England, who has nearly turned his 71st year.

He too, is grey, and though he looks at you with a sternlike expression, almost approaching to severity, he is the kindest of all the poets of our day. Using the conventional *Thee* and *Thou* upon all occasions in his talk and in his letters, he carefully eschews them in his poetry. He is the great anti-slavery apostle, the firm friend of the coloured race, the life-long companion of William Lloyd Garrison, and the orator Wendell Phillips. His best days were spent in behalf of the slave, and the grandest of his lyrics and idyls breathe out his love for freedom and his abhorrence of oppression and tyranny.

There stands the translator of Homer, whose venerable head is said to resemble closely the blind Greek's, with white hair and patriarchal beard, and piercing eye that seems to look into a man as if it could read his very soul, and interpret his slightest thought. This is the author of "*Thanatopsis*," that great poem which startled mankind years before Tennyson wrote a line of poetry, and long before Byron's death was whispered in London; a poem which was written when its author had scarcely reached his 18th year. This is Bryant, aged 83, whose death, last June, has left a blank which is still unfilled. It was only the other day, it seems, that he wrote his graceful sonnet to the memory of the historian of the Netherlands—John Lothrop Motley—and his "*Flood of Years*," by many esteemed his best work, was written scarcely three years ago. What a privilege the old poet has enjoyed! He lived in two centuries. He saw the old school of poetry pass away, and he witnessed the dawn of the new. For 60 years and more he was the intimate of the great ones, who, in the two hemispheres, have led thought, and scholarship and song. And in his turn, he became a leader himself in all three. He wrote creditable stanzas ere the fanciful Shelley died, and his name rang through the four quarters of the globe long before Coleridge had ceased to write.

The contemporary of Moore, of Sheridan, of Wordsworth, of Keats, the Howitts, the Lambs, DeQuincey, and William Hazlitt, the companion of Irving, of Cooper, of Cole and of Fitz-Greene Halleck, he saw many a poet blossom into song, live his brief life and silently pass away to the other world. He read the wonderful creations of Scott as they came fresh from the press. He published a volume of poems before the present laureate of England was born, and a second edition of his poetry appeared when Longfellow was a babe of scarcely a year old. He began life early, and as a child was as precocious as Macaulay, and as eager to read as Whipple, who knew the "Citizen of the World" before he was six.

This one to Bryant's left is the ever joyous, ever charming, ever sparkling Holmes, the autocrat, professor and poet of every breakfast table in the land, the delight of our firesides, the Addison of our day. Lowell compares him to a full-charged Leyden-Jar. None can chat more pleasantly than he. None can tell you so much in as little space, as Holmes. Below the medium height, and almost beardless, he stands a man of 69. None surpass him in scholarly ability, readiness of repartee, playfulness of humour or vigor of mind.

Next to Holmes stands the poet and critic Lowell, who, you know, has recently been sent by his government to Spain, as Minister at the Court of Madrid. Observe well the wealth of intelligence in Lowell's face. He it was who wrote the crisp and natty "Biglow Papers"—those bright satires, which in their time, aroused so much political and social excitement. He is hardly 60 years old, and to look at him you would think him younger even than that. Famed as a critic, he is equally distinguished as a poet and humorist. Few men now living possess his keen analytical power. Few equal his capacity and strength.

The tall gentleman who is sitting by that little table, near the window, has a Canadian as well as an American reputation. An historian of splendid attainments, he, a few months ago, published a fresh volume—"Frontenac"—and in that book we have a complete account of the distinguished French Governor's life in Canada. This is Francis Parkman—a great name in literature, a true Canadian at heart—and the author of no less than eight volumes of history, a charming book on the rose, and one novel.

This is Curtis, the polished and polite editor of "Harper's Magazine," as dainty in his young days—and he is not very old now—as Nathaniel Willis was when he called on that strong-minded woman, Harriet Martineau.

Standing by him, chatting agreeably, is Edward Everett Hale, the acute observer who wrote, you remember, some years since, that odd thing which everybody believed to be truth at first, called "The Man without a Country"—ill-fated Philip Nolan.

This is Whipple. Many of you have seen him doubtless, for he has lectured often in Canada. He is a critic of excellent taste. Hawthorne used to say he liked to read Whipple's opinions and criticisms, even when they disagreed with his own, because they were so honest and just. Macaulay, too, recognized his originality and culture and superior talents. His face seems to tell you how full of fun he is, how full of dry and shrewd observation. Whipple never cuts up a book, as Jeffrey used to, for the mere love of saying sharp and spiteful things.

The old gentleman who is sitting a little behind Professor Lowell, and immediately below that speaking portrait of Henry Thoreau, the Hermit of Walden, which is hanging on the wall, is Bronson Alcott, the mystic teacher of Con-

cord. Age sits lightly upon his brow. He is nearly four score, and a year ago last September witnessed a further volume of *Table Talk* from his pen. He is the father of the brilliant Alcott girls, May, the artist, whose paintings have won the admiration of that severe art critic John Ruskin, and Louisa, whose charming "Little Women" and "Little Men" are lovingly treasured in many households.

And this one, with "beard scarce silvered," is James T. Fields, poet and publisher, of whom Whittier has said :

"He knew each living pundit well,  
Could weigh the gifts of him or her,  
And well the market value tell  
Of Poet and Philosopher."

Truly, we are in famous company to-night, for these are the illustrious contemporaries of that strange, quizzical looking gentleman, whom you may observe busying himself with looking after the comfort of his guests, in his old-fashioned home, in Concord, which nestles behind a perfect bower of beautiful elms. This is Emerson aged 75, philosopher, poet, essayist. Look well at him, for he will engage a good deal of your attention to-night. Notice the impersonal grey eyes, the mouth which seems to reveal his every thought, even before he speaks, the smile which, now and then, plays so lambently over his face. His home is situated on the old Concord and Boston turnpike road, a mile away from the railroad station. You pass it on the way to Mr. Alcott's house, once the residence of Robert Hagburn, the early lover and at last the husband of Rose Garfield, of whom you have read in Hawthorne's posthumous romance. A little behind Alcott's is the famous Hawthorne House, the home of "Septimius Felton," a two-story house, gabled before, but with only two rooms on a floor, crowded upon by the hill behind, a house strongly built with great thick walls; such a house, indeed, as you would expect to find as the dwell-



ling of a man who believed, as the romancer's hero believed, that he was destined to live forever. This curious old house is fast losing its charm. The wide walls never reveal now the secrets which they heard long ago. All is closed to the novelist. No more are the tall stairs climbed by the weird magician, who so often climbed them to the square tower-room, where he passed so many quiet days in that seclusion which he sometimes loved. The house is now a girls' school, and the poetry of the place is fast departing.

Mr. Emerson's habits are very plain and homely. He is politic and though somewhat idealistic, as you may discover from reading his essays, yet no man living is fuller of common sense, and knowledge of the ways of the world. He does most of his literary work in the morning, and begins immediately after breakfast. You will seldom find him writing later than noon. He composes slowly, and considers thoughtfully every word which he uses. He is full of anecdote and story, and his pages show the result of extensive reading and acute observation. Few men have the faculty which he enjoys, of condensing thought and of imparting information. It is a study to sit before him and watch the growth of ideas as they come fresh from his mind. He seems to evolve them from his brain until they grow symmetrical and perfect and beautiful. Even an old idea appears new when clothed in the warm Emersonian garb. He develops his subject until it grows under his hand. It is bright in the gorgeous colouring it receives. It is strong in a marked individuality and tone. You read the speeches of Chatham, of Burke, and of Canning; you listen to the orations of Choate, of Webster, "the God-like Daniel," and of Phillips; at school you learn the story of Demosthenes and of Cicero, but if you would know what eloquence and true oratory are, you must read the interpretation of them as formulated by Emerson. So with

"Greatness," so with "Heroism," so with the passion "Love," so with "Art," "Beauty," "Nature," and "Poetry." If you would understand all these, turn over the pages of the Thinker, and realize how little you knew of them before. Sir Walter Scott has told you of the greatness of Napoleon, Mr. Abbott has given you a warm-colored if not quite correct life of the little Corporal who overran Europe with his splendid and slaughter armies; but Emerson tells you something about Napoleon, the man of the world, which makes you wonder at the incisive and intuitive skill of the critic who has something new and original to say about everything and everybody. You would think after Addison and Macaulay, after Guizot and Goethe, after Hazlitt and the thousand other scholars who have written so many chapters and books about the "Sweet swan of Avon," that there was little left for mortal man to say about him. But almost defiantly the seer of Concord takes down his pen and unravels from that full-charged and teeming brain of his, a perfect masterpiece of acute criticism on Shakespeare viewed as a poet. You cannot help wondering how it is that he can find so many things untouched by his predecessors, masters as they were in their special art. But why need I enumerate? His works stand fitting exponents of his power and culture.

You might think, perhaps, that inasmuch as his essays are, for the most part, on such subjects as "The over soul," "Immortality," "Plato—the Philosopher," "Worship," "Culture," "Behavior," and kindred topics, that they would be rather dry reading, with barely a light bit, now and then, to relieve them. But this is a mistake. Emerson has a rare fund of humour, and a delicious relish for a jest. Scattered all through his writings, even in his profounder articles, there are flashes of playful humour, and often quaint bits of good-natured satire. It is Emerson who tells the story of the Sultan who looked in the glass

and seeing how ugly he was, began to weep. A courtier standing near began to weep also, and continued to do so long after the Sultan was consoled. At last his master inquired the occasion of this excessive sorrow, since he, himself, who was the ugly man, had been able to stop his lamentations. But the courtier answered: "If thou hast only seen thy face once, and at once seeing hast not been able to contain thyself, but hast wept, what should we do—we who see thy face every day and night? If *we* weep not, who should weep? Therefore have I wept."

In illustration of the humorous side of his character, there is this somewhat characteristic anecdote. Miss Elizabeth Peabody—a zealous apostle of the Kindergarten schools, in Boston, once called on Mr. Emerson at his home, and soon became very much animated in a discussion on Berkeley's doctrine, that matter had no actual existence, and that spiritual entities are the only realities. She did her best to convince the philosopher of the truth and value of this theory. Emerson listened respectfully to the animated talk of the lady, when, on looking up, he observed through his window, a load of wood being driven into his yard. It distracted his attention for a minute or two, but as he wished to be very polite—he paid no heed to it and continued listening to his guest's conversation, until he chanced to see the waggon passing into the yard. Though loth to interrupt her, he arose and said he must be excused a moment, as he wished to direct the man where to unload the wood; then he added with a smile and a twinkle in his eye: "You know things must be looked after, although they do not exist."

At another time when a committee waited on him for a lecture, one of the gentlemen asked him his terms. "Oh well," said he, "when I lecture in Boston I charge one hundred dollars, when I lecture in Worcester my charge is

seventy-five dollars. In Salem I get fifty dollars, and when I come to your town I will charge say—\$30, and if that is too much, the people may pay me what they choose; I want to be easy." Mrs. Emerson, who was present, spoke up and said, "Yes, I think Mr. Emerson is altogether too easy." "Oh, but," said Emerson to the gentleman, "you must not tell that to your people. Tell them I am a tough old fellow."

He lectured once to an audience of farmers in the West. The next year he was asked again to the same town, because, the committee said, though he was pretty dull, he seemed to have a good many good ideas, and it was worth while encouraging such men, now and then.

"The world is soon coming to an end," cried an excited Millerite to him one day. "Is it," said Emerson, "then we will just have to try and get along without it."

Emerson seldom speaks publicly without notes, which are usually made on small scraps of paper. Sometimes these loose pages get misplaced, but such an accident does not disturb him in the least. He very deliberately and with admirable nerve, proceeds to gather up his papers, look them calmly over, and when they are all right again, he turns to his audience and goes on with his address or lecture. He is serene and composed through it all—through what many would consider a very trying and painful ordeal. He loves to talk in a friendly way before a company, and it is to these "talks" that we are indebted for many of the finest things which afterwards get into his essays, in a somewhat more elaborate form. The excellent paper on "Books," is the outgrowth of one of these informal *conversazioni*. He chats with delightful freedom about the greater and lesser books of the world, and tells us what we should read and what we should avoid. He prefers good translations of the old masters of literature, in many



instances, to the originals. Much valuable time, he considers, is lost in reading the latter. He likes to be beholden to the "great Metropolitan English speech, the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven." Three rules he lays down for our guidance. They are briefly, first, "never read any book that is not a year old," second, "never read any but famed books," third, "never read any but what you like."

Harriet Martineau—a jealous and masculine woman, once said of the wonderfully gifted Margaret Fuller, that she was, in her young days, the most intolerable girl that ever took a seat in a drawing-room. And Emerson, when he first met her,—more advanced in years and in the full possession of her marvellous faculties,—said that he was instantly repelled and his first thought was, that he could never like her. Margaret Fuller was, in her time, the best educated woman in New England, I might almost say, in the world. Her father was a lawyer, and a man much given to study. He eagerly crammed his daughter with knowledge, so much so indeed, that her mind thrived at the expense of her body. Her physical energies decreased as those of her mind increased. She read French and German at an age when other girls were yet in their doll-days. She grew up, naturally, with a high idea of her own intellectual calibre. She saw how superior she was, mentally, to all her companions. She was vain of her attainments, and made no scruple of talking of her own abilities to all who listened to her. Once she said, and this was in her middle age, "I now know all the people worth knowing in America, and I find no intellect comparable to my own." She studied every character she met, and those who saw her for the first time felt uneasy in her presence. She was haughty, cold, uncongenial and repellent. She was all head and no heart before strangers. But when Margaret Fuller thawed out, and acquaintance ripened into friendship,

you forgot that you had ever disliked her, or that she was proud and overbearing. You felt that you were in the presence of no ordinary woman. All feeling of uncomfortableness vanished as you listened to the conversation of this most brilliant talker of her day, Coleridge and DeQuincey alone excepted. It was her custom to entertain the brightest and most intellectual men and women of her time, at evening and morning talks. She founded a Club in Boston, in 1839,—a sort of conversation class for women, and all of these talks were of the richest character and scope. Sometimes she would do most of the talking herself, at others she would start the topic, and watch the turn of the conversation, and when it showed signs of flagging or grew less animated, like a skilful commander she brought up her reserves and plunging into the engagement herself, the talk again became vigorous and active. The discourses were generally upon themes likely to awaken thought, and kindle into life such subjects as were dear to the heart of this seemingly inspired lady. It is worth considering the influence which she exercised over her converts, and the way in which she enlisted to her support such minds as Emerson, Hawthorne, Ripley, Alcott and Curtis. Even Harriet Martineau learned to like her afterwards;—that is she liked her as much, probably, as she could ever like anybody. Margaret Fuller possessed no personal attractions whatever. She rarely smiled. There was little in her manner calculated to win men and women to her side, and as she grew in years she became more and more unprepossessing in appearance. It was to the vastness of her intellectual powers alone that scholars everywhere bowed. It was her culture which won Mr. Emerson, and made him aver that he was every day more and more surprised at the range and grasp of her genius. The writings of this lady reveal a tenderness and pathos, which only her own immediate friends knew she possessed. Strangers always misunderstood her. With her

great contemporary Emerson it is different. In personal life people are drawn towards him by the loveliness of his disposition and the sweetness of his character. His writings, perhaps, seem to some a little cold at first. It is only when you have learned how to read them that you enjoy the massive grandeur of his thought and the harmonious beauty of his periods. Johnson, you remember, learned to love Thomson's poetry by skipping every other line. From the primer to Emerson is a wide stretch. You must read many books before you can venture on the perusal of a single sentence. He has none of the affectation of Carlyle, none of the harsh ruggedness of Hume, of whom Horne Tooke once said that he wrote his history, as the witches said their prayers—backwards, nor has he the callous insincerity of Jeffrey, but you are struck with the singularity of his manner, the oddness of his thought, and his frigid way of stating the simplest fact. His chief fault is the glittering coldness, the almost Grecian manner of his style, which obtains in the more profound of his writings. It is only the few who have discovered how many quotable things abound in his works—as many as you find in George Eliot or Holmes. To understand him aright you must first master his peculiarities of diction, and when you have accomplished that you have done a fair day's work. A great scholar once bought Emerson's essays at a book stall, and then he went home to enjoy them. The next day he bought a copy of Webster's Dictionary. He was not to be baffled. Armed thus he went to work in earnest, and after a time he succeeded in fully mastering his author. This was the eminent Herman Grimm whose writings some of you have doubtless read. Mr. Grimm began wrong. He attacked the heavy artillery when he should have made his onslaught on Emerson's musketry corps, or cavalry brigade. He should have begun with the lectures, those poetic and popularized addresses which were especially prepared for Lyceum audiences. Beginning with these he

could have worked up with his author until he reached the purple clouds. Arriving there he would know just where he was. After you are familiar with your Latin grammar you had better take up *Dilectus*. Horace can wait a term or two.

Comparisons have been drawn between Carlyle and Emerson. It is averred that a strong similarity of mind exists between these two master-reasoners of this century. It has been hinted that Emerson has borrowed occasionally some of the sage of Chelsea's ideas and better thoughts. This is not so. Anyone who has ever read a page of these Thinkers will yield that. Both men are sincere and earnest. Both possess powerful resources of mind, and both are highly cultured. Both are independent. In some general way perhaps, they think alike, that is they hold certain ideas in common, but so do Matthew Arnold and Max Muller, and the breath of suspicion has never been uttered against them. Neither of them can tolerate cant, hypocrisy, bigotry nor charlatanism. They both manfully uphold the truth and love the grand and myriad works of Nature. All through his writings Emerson says noble things about Carlyle and his work, and Carlyle in his turn not only edited the English edition of Emerson but he prefaced one volume with these generous words: "Here comes our brave Emerson with *news* from the Empyrean." Carlyle hates a sham, and he never would have written that line if he did not believe heartily in Emerson and his teachings.

In 1833, on his return from a tour in Sicily, Italy and France, Emerson visited the Thinker of Ecclefechan, who was then regarded as the latest and strongest contributor to the English critical journals. In that same year he had met Wordsworth, the vivacious DeQuincey, Landor and the transcendentalist Coleridge. It was to see these five



authors that Emerson, who is by no means a good traveller, crossed the Atlantic Ocean. The only other man, he cared to see since Scott was dead, was the Iron Duke, and he saw him some time afterward at the funeral of Wilberforce. The young poet was in splendid frame to see the men who had won renown and his own admiration and esteem, by their writings. He had just come from Florence and Rome, where he had paced the galleries and walked the studios of the painters and sculptors. His susceptible mind had taken in all that was grand and imposing in those magnificent museums which contain all that generations of sculptors and painters have left for the admiration and wonder and instruction of the world. He met Horatio Greenough—a sculptor then fast rising into fame—at Florence, and with him he inspected the gorgeous triumphs of the chisel and the pencil. One can imagine the effect which a visit to Italy would have upon a mind like Emerson's. His intuitive eye saw only the perfections of art, and he lingered long and lovingly over the masterpieces of Angelo, of Raffael, of Perugino, of John of Bologna, and of others of like fame and name. He had just given up his Church and parted in sadness with his congregation. He turned therefore with relief to the beautiful things which met his eye, in this historic birthplace of all that is enduring and noble in art, in poetry and in song. Landor was in Italy then, and Emerson spent many hours with him. You can imagine how delicious these talks must have been. They talked of Washington, whom the author of the "Imaginary Conversations," greatly admired, of Byron, whose fame was then spreading far and wide into the remotest nooks and corners of the world, of Wordsworth the old poet of Rydal Mount, and a Laker, of the playwrights Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher, whose writings are highly prized but seldom read. Montaigne, whom Emerson venerated as the apple of his eye, Landor could or would not praise. Mackintosh the reviewer, another favorite of

Emerson's, Lander did not like, and so on through the long list, Lander did not fail to express himself strongly and warmly when the occasion needed. Emerson found him living in a cloud of pictures, in a fine house overlooking a far-stretching landscape. He was courteous and did not at all bear out the reputation which Emerson had formed of him from the anecdotes he had heard and the stories which had been told about him. He felt, however, that he was despotic and apt to be violent, but in spite of all this none knew better how to write elegantly and well, and for wisdom, wit and imagination, he was the favourite of all scholars and the readers of scholarly literature. There was still too much of the bluff soldier in his nature however.

From Italy Emerson went to England and there he saw Coleridge, whom he found taking snuff. He was a short thick old man, with bright blue eyes and a fine clear complexion. He had read a good many books that had been printed in America, and some of these he admired exceedingly. He spoke favorably of Allston the poet, whom we know better, perhaps, on account of his paintings. Coleridge knew of them too, for he had met the artist in Rome, and had thought him a master of the true Titianesque. He spoke of Doctor Channing and regretted the religious turn in his life, which had developed into Unitarianism. He told Emerson, among other interesting things, of the extraordinary skill of Montague, the picture dealer who could determine the age of a picture by merely passing his hand over its surface.

Wordsworth, Emerson saw in August. He was then a plain white-haired old man, not prepossessing in appearance, and the great green goggles which he wore did not at all improve his looks. He talked simply and with much freedom. Of course the conversation turned on books and the writers of them. The old poet was quite vigorous in

denouncing and abusing Goethe's masterpiece. What would he say if he were living to-day, to find Joseph Cook ranking it the chief of the six great novels in the world? Carlyle, Wordsworth thought was insane on some points. He considered him clever and deep but obscure. Coleridge he thought, wrote in a way not always understood. He recited some new sonnets to Emerson, which he had just finished, and you may be sure the recital gave the young man both pleasure and surprise. Of his own poems he preferred those which touched on the affections, rather than the more didactic, which he thought would perish while the others would live. He esteemed higher than any of his writings the sonnet which he wrote "On the feelings of a high-minded Spaniard." This and "The two Voices," he quoted rather lovingly.

The interview with Carlyle was a treat. Emerson had long wished to make the acquaintance of this man, this robust leader of thought, then in the full vigor of his powers. Wordsworth was old. Coleridge was old. Both had completed their work, that is, by far the best part of it. But here was a man of iron strength and will and purpose. A man who hated shams, a worthy successor to Johnson, one who created and led opinion. Emerson hastened to Craigenputtock, and found the house "amid desolate heathery hills, where the lonely scholar nourished his mighty heart." Carlyle had been a man from his younger days. He was now tall and gaunt and his brow was cliff-like and severe. He was self-possessed, and talked in an easy, familiar manner. His accent was the broad Scotch of his forefathers, and he used it with an evident relish. He was full of anecdote and humour, and Emerson felt at home in his company from the very first. They talked long about books and of Gibbon whom Carlyle called magnificently "that splendid bridge from the old world to the new." He admired Rousseau, Goethe, Schiller, Robertson, DeFoe and

Sterne. He belittled Socrates and would not read Plato. He had odd names for everything, *Blackwood* he called "The Sand Magazine," and *Fraser's*, to which he was a frequent contributor himself, he dubbed "The Mountain Magazine." Thus they talked these two men who are brothers in thought, Carlyle to Scotland what Arnold is to England and Emerson is to America. Over the long hills they walked together that day, and looked at Criffel. Then they sat and talked again. Carlyle looked towards London, which was to him, then, the heart of the world. It was a huge machine and he liked it. There is nothing in Emerson's writings so delightful as these impressions of Carlyle, these jottings from his note book, these pen-portraits of the men of genius whom he saw. Of the five that talked with him in those days, but one remains. Coleridge, DeQuincey, Landor and Wordsworth are dead.

No man has been more sinned against for his religious faith than Emerson. No man has been more systematically misrepresented and less understood. He has been called a Pagan, an Atheist, an Unbeliever, a Pantheist. Men profess to see in him much that is bad and little that is good. People who have never read a line of his poetry, or took the merest dip out of his essays, have been the first and the readiest to assail him. He is a good man to abuse for he makes no reply, and those who prefer charges against him have it all their own way. He detests controversy, and naturally enough all the small pop-guns in the land are pointed at him. He has allowed these misrepresentations to grow so long undisturbed that to-day they assume not only respectable but quite leviathan proportions. There is something refreshingly cool about the way in which the Thinker meets every fresh attack which is made upon him. He only smiles at the ingenuity of his foes and says—nothing. He does what he believes to be right, and the world must be content with that. He goes on



affirming and making stronger his principles and aims. He neither apologizes nor explains. He wears no mask and he conceals nothing. He grows up, as Whipple says, "to a level with the spiritual objects he perceives, and his elevation of thought is the sign and accompaniment of a corresponding elevation of character. By his patience he has earned the right to speak as he does and to act as he does."

Emerson is the outcome of eight generations of orthodox preachers. He was born in 1803, and after graduating with high honors at Harvard in 1821, he entered the divinity class, and shortly afterwards took charge of a congregation in Boston, as the colleague of Henry Ware, Jr. He inherited strong Puritan ideas, and was much given to serious contemplation. His studies took a wide range, and led him to seek out from among the mass of authors whose works crowded the shelves of the libraries, such as were congenial to his taste and nature. He read Plato and Socrates, and mastered the logic of Locke and the philosophy of the great German teacher Emmanuel Kant. These writers influenced largely the current of his thought. He could not always agree with them in what they advanced, but less than all with what John Locke taught. Plato was his delight. Kant was his guide. He read these authors with much care, but it was not for years yet to come that he felt their influence working upon his mind. He continued his reading, and the ministrations of his office, as pastor of a congregation. No preacher was more beloved by his people. They vied with one another in showing proofs of the affection and esteem in which they held him. Even after he had hurled into their midst the thunderbolt which led to the separation between them, there were many in his church who thought some arrangement could yet be made by which he could be retained as their spiritual chief. You know why he resigned his charge, and why he retired from the ministry after a

service of four years, for you have seen, doubtless, his remarkable letter of December, 1832, and read the great sermon which he preached,—the only one he ever published,—about the same time. He gave up his church because, according to his way of thinking, he could not consistently administer the rite of the holy sacrament. It was after this that he went to England and the Continent. On his return he settled down a man of leisure, and of letters, and busied himself with writing papers for the magazines, an occasional book, and lecturing to the people on social and other topics. He achieved fame as a lecturer, and his college orations made him even more famous. His first book was published in 1839. This was "Nature," a volume of essays far in advance of the time in which they were written, and their sale was accordingly slow. It took twelve years to exhaust the first edition of five hundred copies! This admirable book—the keynote to Emerson's other and perhaps more popular writings, has of late years become a favorite with cultured readers. In July, 1840, Mr. Emerson accepted the editorship of a new journal of philosophy, literature and religion, entitled *The Dial*. Miss Fuller afterwards became identified with this serial, and for some numbers she was the editor. This publication nearly caused a revolution in religious thought. The leading writers of New England contributed poems and papers to its pages, and it soon grew to be quite influential and vigorous.

Some of you will be curious to know more about Emerson's belief. He has been called a Transcendentalist, and his associates have been more or less interested in that peculiar faith. The Transcendentalism to which Emerson pinned his faith was not the Transcendentalism of Kant, or of Fichte, or of Coleridge, or of Wordsworth. It was an institution peculiar and indigenous to the soil of New England. It grew nowhere else. It

could thrive nowhere else. Like a great wave it washed the shores of New England, overran the country and found a foothold and a resting place there and there alone. Its tenets were too exalted, its professors demanded too much, and it soon lost support, then languished and finally died a quiet and natural death. A quarter of a century ago hardly a man of any note lived in New England who was not an ardent disciple and sympathizer in this famous newness of thought movement. To-day you could scarcely find a half dozen—I know myself of but one, Mr. Alcott—who hold the same views, even if you looked for them among those who were living twenty-five years ago. Frothingham who wrote the life of Gerrit Smith, a biography which you remember was suppressed a few weeks after publication, was once a noted apostle of Transcendentalism. Theodore Parker was another, though it is said of him that he hardly knew it himself. Emerson was more of an idealist than a Transcendentalist, but he held some of the same views. Ripley gave up all he had for it, and even sold his valuable library to raise money to help its growth. Whittier felt so warmly towards it that at one time its teachings shone through every line of his poetry. Lowell wrote for the *Dial* some of his sincerest papers. Margaret Fuller was bewitched by it. Sylvester Judd wrote his novel of *Margaret* as an illustration of the whole creed. Curtis and Hawthorne had their warmest sympathies awakened by it. Indeed, the whole literature of New England was more or less tinged by the doctrine of the new faith. It grew to be the fashion—and you know that when Good Dame Fashion speaks her word is law, and her dictum must be obeyed. Every village had its school. It was a new religion, and men and women who went to church but seldom, if at all, were foremost in trying to build up and foster the new faith. Some of them hardly knew what it all meant; but they joined just the same. You have heard the story of the gruff old doctor who on being asked what New Eng-

land Transcendentalism was, replied by pointing to a high bluff and asking: "Do you see that bluff over there with all those swallow holes in it? Well, take away the bluff and you have New England Transcendentalism." But smile as we may the new religion succeeded in drawing towards it a coterie of scholars and thinkers which represented the best thought and the highest culture in America. Many, and George Bancroft, the historian, among the rest, believed it would live. It started well, but there were too many heads to it. It was all intellect and each mind strove to interpret the doctrine to suit himself. In a little while a dozen separate Transcendental beliefs were current, then there were more, and finally the theory which had some good points in it, collapsed altogether and became a hopeless wreck. Emerson, as I have said, differed much from his brethren. He was, and is to-day, an Idealist. He believes that in God we live and move and have our being. He believes in the communion of the Spirit of God with the soul of man. He believes in no material hypothesis that imperils man's spiritual interests. He believes in intuition. He does not claim for the soul any especial faculty by which truths of a spiritual relation are seen as objects are noticed by the senses. He is not a dogmatist. He allows full ingress to the mind and egress from it. In his essay on "Worship," he says that "immortality will come to such as are fit for it, and he who would be a great soul in the future, must be a great soul now." The doctrine must rest on our own experience. It is too great to rest on any legend, or on any experience but our own. He says further that the practical faculties are developed faster than the spiritual. And in other chapters he tells us you will find skepticism in the streets and hotels, and in places of coarse amusement. Everything is prospective and man is to live hereafter. The soul does not age with the body, he continues, and the greater the man is the more ambitious is he that his work shall be better, and the more does he be-

lieve that his work is still far short of what it should be. This flying ideal, Emerson holds, is the perpetual promise of the Creator. Our intellectual action gives us a feeling of absolute existence. We breathe a purer air. Nature never spares the individual. Future state is an illusion for the ever present state. It is not length of life but depth of life.

It is because of the serenity of his faith that Emerson avoids controversy and discussion about his religious teachings. He is an earnest believer in the doctrine of which I have given you but the merest outline. He has full confidence in it. He looks for perfection in individual man. He has boundless charity and openness of heart for all. He demands liberality of thought. He places Faith before Charity, higher even than Charity. He cherishes the sentiment of a universal brotherhood. He takes every man at his best, and he considers the *motive* as well as the *action* of the doer. He believes in a bright, cheerful religion. He peoples his faith with beautiful, delightful things. His imageries are fanciful and pretty. Creeds he holds to be structural and necessary to the action of the human mind. He is an Idealist pure and simple.

I will not detain you with an account of Brook-farm—that mild and Arcadian experiment which originated in the brain of George Ripley, and to which many of the prominent Transcendentalists belonged. It was a short-lived institution, and its scheme was too ambitious to be practicable. Emerson, though not a member, had some sympathy with it, and he and Margaret Fuller were occasional guests of the little community at West Roxbury, whose laudable object was the cultivation of the soil as well as the mind.

Nor will I ask you to consider the courage of Emerson during the abolition movement of half a century ago, when every pulpit in Boston was closed against anti-slavery



teachings save his own. He had the daring to bid defiance to the multitude who clamored for the body and the blood of the bondman. It was a memorable Sabbath that of the 29th of May, 1831, when the doors of the Hanover Street Church flew open and Samuel J. May mounted the steps of the pulpit, and thundered his anathemas against the slave-holder and his associates. It was an innovation, and several years had to elapse before the pastors of other churches felt courageous enough to follow the grand example of Emerson.

Let us now consider our author as a poet. He is not what the world would call a great poet. His greatness rather appears in his prose. But while he has written few poems of unusual mark, he has written many musical, sunshiny pieces of great excellence and purity. His poetry is the outcome of a cultivated mind. His peculiar views enrich it materially, but his poetry is not always symmetrical and even. His poems remind you of a series of paintings of various degrees of merit. You notice a want of harmony in the one, and a careless disregard for tune and time, in the other. His poems are prophecies, and they appeal directly to the head and scarcely at all to the heart. A scholarly man only, could write them. They have little warmth, and some of them are cold and wanting in those genuine touches of nature which shine so luminously and conspicuously in the verses of Byron, Bryant, Keats, and Robert Burns. Some one has said Scott's poetry is a poetical guide to Scotland. Emerson's poetry is a guide to the Idealist's faith. It is often fanciful, often full of graceful images, and always full of thought and expression. I have said he was fanciful at times. He loves to paint in bright, joyous colours the beauties of nature. He does not believe with the Quaker-lady, who, you know, thought it would have been much more seemly if all the flowers had been created drab colour, instead of such flaunting reds

and blues and yellows. If you would write poetry that would live, something more than mere felicity of expression and smoothness of versification are needed. We are forgetting poets every day who have done no more than this—poets whose names have indeed been "writ in water." Tennyson is a fastidious thinker, forever changing and altering his work. Wordsworth was pretty much the same, though he seldom corrected his stanzas after they had once appeared in type. Emerson has almost a contempt for the versifier whose only skill is musicality of rhythm. He considers that the greatness of a poem is due to its conception and design. No skill of execution can atone if these be wanting. "We want an architect and they bring us an upholsterer."

Emerson often gets in among the clouds. He is dreamy, listless, abstracted and thoughtful. Socrates, you remember, would stand for hours almost motionless, when thought had possession of him. He used to listen to what he called the supernatural and prophetic voices. Dante was often in an abstracted, forgetful mood, and he used to go about the streets as if he were possessed of a demon. People would shudder as he passed, and the whisper went from mouth to mouth, "there goes the man who has been in Hell." Halleck walked about New York for days with whole poems in his head, speaking to nobody, but brooding over his verses until opportunity offering, he wrote down his thoughts, thoughts which were bursting through him at every pore. Lowell composes in his mind long before he commits his work to paper. Longfellow is sometimes haunted for days and cannot rest until he has laid his tormentor by writing down what is tearing madly through him. It is the same with Emerson. He can only secure peace and rest to his mind by filling the page before him with the poem which cries for utterance. The range of his poetry is not very large, but it is very deep. I can-

not say that all of Mr. Emerson's poetry is of the very highest order of merit, but "Brahma," "Rhodora,"—full of tender suggestion as it is—"Letters," "The Snow Storm," "The Humble Bee,"—which so many refused to listen to at first—"The Sea," "Heroism," and "The Boston Hymn," are poems which enrich the language, and I cannot help feeling that the world is better because they were written. Though a mystic, Emerson is not one quarter as unintelligible as Mr. Robert Browning, who gave us a few years ago a poem in two ponderous volumes which he called "The Ring and the Book." Mr. Browning, you know, is the gentleman who wrote "Sordello"—a work which was handed to Douglas Jerrold once, as he was recovering from an illness which had kept him indoors for several days. His wife had gone out to make a few purchases, and the wit sat by the fire with the book open before him. He read the pages over and over again. The perspiration stood in great beads upon his forehead. He laid the volume down and almost shrieked, "Good God! I am an idiot." His wife coming in just then he handed her the book; "read, read," he exclaimed wildly. Mrs. Jerrold read a few pages, and throwing the poem down, vexatiously said, "Bother the man, I can't understand a word he says." "Thank Heaven for that," cried Jerrold springing from his chair, "I thought it was my own reason which was going."

Emerson's poetry is admired by the few. He has a select but not a very large audience. One requires to read his poems often. They grow upon you as a beautiful picture does. Ripley, who is ever cautious in hazarding an opinion, thinks that it is Emerson's "subtle thinking and meditative wisdom which impart such a rich and substantial vitality to his verse." Emerson throws his whole soul into his work, and his poetry reveals a phase of his inner self. It is his heaviness of thought, if I might call it by that name for want of a better one, which prevents his poetry from

becoming popular, and widely read among the masses. He has only published two volumes of verse, the first one in 1847, and the other "May-day," some twenty years later. A year or two ago he edited an excellent collection of poems which he called "Parnassus." The book owes its origin to a habit which the poet cultivated of copying into a common-place book such poems or parts of poems as pleased him, in the course of his reading. He had in this way a good collection of his favorites within a small compass. This was an advantage, for he could turn at will and read the poems he loved the best, without having to hunt through his own and his friends' libraries for them. After a time his book grew so large that he had to get a new one, and at last he thought such poems as he possessed might please others beside himself were they printed in convenient form. Accordingly he gathered them up, threw them into divisions, and his "Parnassus," really representing the cream of fugitive and other poetry, became a fact. Many like to read the poetry which a poet selects. As one might expect, the greater part of the volume is composed of poetry which the cultivated classes only care to read.

Emerson has written but one striking poem—a poem which seems to me to overshadow everything else that we find in his poetry. It is his exquisite description of a snow-storm. I wish that I could read it to you as I once heard it read a few years ago, in the early autumn when the leaves were just beginning to turn :—

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,  
Arrives the snow ; and, driving o'er the fields,  
Seems nowhere to alight ; the whiteed air  
Hides hills and woods, the river and the heaven,  
And veils the farm-house at the garden's end.  
The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet  
Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit  
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed  
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.  
Come see the north wind's masonry,

Out of an unseen quarry, evermore  
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer  
Curves his white bastions with projected roof  
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door;  
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work  
So fanciful, so savage; naught cares he  
For number or proportion. Mockingly,  
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;  
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;  
Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,  
Maugre the farmer's sighs; and at the gate  
A tapering turret overtops the work.  
And when his hours are numbered, and the world  
Is all his own, retiring as he were not,  
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art  
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,  
Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,  
The frolic architecture of the snow.

Ladies and Gentlemen,—I have tried to tell you something this evening about one of the most profound and venerated thinkers of our age. It is difficult to treat a subject so vast as this one is, in a popular way, without to a certain extent largely weakening it. Emerson is a man whose power for good or evil is very great. He is a thinker who every year gains ground and loses none. He is growing into men's minds. He is enlisting, with no apparent effort of his own, new converts, day by day. He is doing his work silently but with terrible earnestness and skill. The vast acres of the universe open before him, and men in every quarter of the globe, sit in wonder and admiration, over the pages of the serene thinker, who never utters an uncertain sound. He has struck a blow at popular prejudice which has dissolved like the dew upon the grass, opinions which the records of centuries made strong and adamant. For years he has lived in advance of his time. But his day has come now. The centuries have caught up with him at last. I am not advocating Transcendentalism, Idealism, Pantheism, Optimism, or the two score and more isms, of the day, but I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that through



such teachers as Emerson and Carlyle, the world is growing, year by year, wiser and better and more liberal. One cannot help enquiring, just here, are these teachings right and proper? Is it better for us all that Emerson has come? Has he done good? What has he accomplished for mankind? Has he made men and women lead purer and holier lives, or are his teachings harmful and erroneous? Is he satisfying, or does he only tantalize us with his mystic phrases and orphic sayings? Must we skip every other line?